

POOR LUTON LACK THE RIGHT PUNCH!

Stein sending off puts an end to Hatters' day of woe

WEST HAM 2 LUTON 0
By PAUL SHERWOOD

LUTON'S inability to turn pressure into goals cost them dear at Upton Park.

Hatters ran the show for the first 25 minutes against a jittery West Ham defence.

But with no real strike power, they were always the likely losers once the home team moved up a couple of gears.

And Luton's misery was complete when Brian Stein threw the Town's only real strike of the afternoon at Alvin Martin's head, and was sent off along with the West Ham defender.

It had all started off promisingly as David Preece's return to first

team action brought some spark to midfield.

Only Mike Newell's slow reactions stopped him reading Stein's first minute dummy that could have set the number nine free 20 yards out.

And again in the fourth minute, Newell was too slow to convert a

chance contrived by Preece, being robbed in the box by a relieved Tony Gale.

West Ham looked nothing like London's biggest hope for the title as they struggled to do anything right.

But their hopes were raised momentarily as a Luton defender seemed to deflect the ball into his own net following a goalmouth scramble.

Referee John Deakin curiously disallowed the third minute effort though, and Luton soon resumed control.

In the 11th minute, Preece and Robert Wilson exchanged passes on the edge of the box and Preece sent Peter Nicholas through.

Bounced

But the Welsh international tried to do too much instead of hitting the ball at goal, and as it bounced loose Wilson failed to control it.

It was left to Preece to try to lead the way a minute later. Playing a smart one-two with Stein

he shot from 20 yards, but with no power or accuracy.

Luton then produced the move that should have sent them a deserved goal up.

Newell laid the ball off to Preece just inside West Ham's half, and then went galloping up the left wing.

Preece's touch to Ashley Grimes resulted in a beautiful long ball to Newell on the edge of the West Ham box and his cross curled invitingly towards the near post.

Hesitated

But Wilson hesitated by the far post as West Ham defenders contrived to scramble the ball away.

Luton's defence showed they could play a bit when West Ham finally came to life.

Les Sealey's one-handed 23rd minute save from a vicious Tony Cottee shot was sheer brilliance and six minutes later Steve Foster was there to stop Cottee breaking free again.

Then came West Ham's 40th minute opener — a rasping 20 yarder from George Parris that apparently deflected off Cottee —

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● Collision course . . . Stein and Martin heading for confrontation.

and Luton were on the rack.

Three times within 10 minutes of the second half, Foster magnificently thwarted West Ham attacks and Rob Johnson defended stoutly as well, robbing Parris as he teed up from 20 yards.

Then Luton threw it all away when no-one picked up Gale's 58th minute corner, and his free header sailed past

the despairing Sealey. That knocked the stuffing totally out of the front runners and the midfield.

Manager John Moore threw Mark Stein on in place of Newell, but the only strike made by the forward line was big brother's dust up with Alvin Martin.

And only Sealey — after brilliantly saving again from Kevin Keen — can look back with

much satisfaction on a fairly dismal day that started off so promisingly.

WEST HAM: Parkes, Stewart, Parris, Gale, Martin, Walford, Keen, McAvennie, Dickens, Cottee, Orr. Sub: Pike.

LUTONTOWN: Sealey, Johnson, Grimes, Nicholas, Foster, Donaghy, Hill, Stein (B), Newell, Wilson, Preece. Sub: Stein (M). Attendance: 19,133.